

Review Article

Veganism Sentiments and Preferences among Muslims

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ABSTRACT

Veganism has become a significant lifestyle which is being religiously practiced by people from across the globe as their routine. To date, the Muslims also followed suit with the trend of veganism in the quest of practicing a healthy lifestyle. Nonetheless, concerns arise on the degree of acknowledgement by the Islamic teachings on such diets which advocate for omitting animal products in one's daily meal. Therefore, this paperwork seeks to identify the elements of veganism from the viewpoints of various perspectives of Muslims, based on their sentiments and personal preferences in order to examine the

relevance of veganism as a lifestyle to be exercised by Muslims. Research data were collected from secondary sources which includes journals, books, papers and internet resources to retrieve information on veganism, vegetarianism and the Islamic theme regarding the issue. This research is important because it will resolve the existing conflict to understand whether the practice of veganism is present in Islam or otherwise. Two elements of veganism are animal rights and vegan diet. The concept of veganism is not existed in Islamic tradition but Islam has its own concept and practices

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 27 October 2020

Accepted: 11 April 2021

Published: 30 June 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.2.36>

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on animal rights. Meanwhile, vegan diet is accepted to be practiced by Muslims as long as according to Islamic rulings.

Keywords: Animal right, Islamic theme, Muslim vegan, vegan diet, veganism

INTRODUCTION

Globally, veganism has become an emerging trend followed by many people. According to Beachy (2014, as cited in Dietrich et al., 2016), the number of people who adopt vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian lifestyles are rising continually. Vegans practice full abstinence from consuming any animal product in diet or any other usage at all. People following the vegan lifestyle abstain from consuming meat or meat-derived products and exclude eggs and dairy products as well (Cramer et al., 2017). Animal by-products such as gelatine or animal rennet are also avoided. Honey, silk, and other insect products may also be considered unacceptable for consumption (Conway, 2019). The attention that was given towards veganism from around the world should not be neglected but needed to be thoroughly discussed, especially from the Muslims point of view. Veganism is not a common culture in Muslims' dietary since Muslims practice Halal dietary concept. Muslims do not have to follow vegan dietary since they are obliged to follow Halal dietary instead. Therefore, this research identifies the important elements of veganism and since there are numerous Muslims adopting the veganism lifestyle, it is important to review works of literature that have

addressed the elements of veganism in order to discuss the relevance of Muslims applying veganism in their lifestyle. This research will also discuss knowledge on the Islamic theme which benefit vegan and non-vegan Muslims. The review starts with an overview of veganism practice among Muslims.

Overview of Veganism Practice among Muslims

As veganism grows bigger in multiple countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and many other countries (Christopher et al., 2018; Flanagan, 2018; Gorman, 2016; Lane, 2019), it has influenced the Muslims too. There are numbers of Muslims who have started practicing veganism as a diet as well as their lifestyle. The Daily Vox reported several Muslim vegans throughout the world choose to not practicing *Qurban* (animal sacrifice tradition) on *Eid Adha* but instead employ vegan approach (Smith, 2018). Instead of practicing animal sacrifice, they donated vegan groceries to the local community and money to charity organizations. Elysia Ward, one of many Muslims who adopted a vegan lifestyle shared her reason for becoming a vegan. "It is not only about the cruel treatment of animals but also about the environment and our health" (Barrie, 2018, para. 4). In the interview, she pointed out that there is nowhere in the Quran that obliges Muslims to consume meat or animals. It is not a must for Muslims to consume meat but if they do want to eat meat, it is a compulsory for Muslims to consume Halal meat only.

So, eat (the flesh) of that (animal) upon which the name of Allah has been invoked (when slaughtering), if you do believe in His verses (Al-An'am (6): 118).

Besides Elysia, a Malaysian, Nur Diyana Abdul Rahim, has written multiple articles and also made videos to share her experience as a vegan and a Muslim on her website, *Diyana* ("Thoughts on being a female", 2020).

According to Mcleod (2018), multiple types of social media platforms used by Muslim vegans shared about their experiences in conversion to vegan diet and further debates on how Islam and veganism warrant each other. Facebook groups are one of the platforms used by Muslim vegans to connect with one another, such as *Vegan Muslim Community*, *Muslim Vegans*, *Australian Vegan Muslims*, *Muslim Vegans for Healthy World*, *Muslim Vegans Vegetarians and their guests*, *Raw Vegan Muslims* and *SG Veg Muslims* as well as Facebook pages such as *Muslim Vegans of Singapore*, *The Black Muslim Vegan*, *Vegan Muslim Initiative*, *Vegan Muslim*, and *Veganism and Islam*.

Moreover, these groups and pages provide the platform and chance for the Muslims who are interested in veganism and Islam to share their personal stories, questions and opinions, recipes, as well as any other information related to veganism in the health aspect or environmental aspect. However, it could be anyone who is interested to be in these groups and has followed the Facebook pages including non-

Muslims too. The researchers for this article have collected the number of accounts that have followed these Facebook groups and Facebook pages. Refer to Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 and Table 2 show the Facebook groups and pages that combined two words - 'vegan' and 'Muslim' - that explicitly portray the interest discussion of those groups and pages which are mainly about vegan practice for Muslims. *Vegan Muslim Community* has the largest number of members.

According to Elysia Ward, the consumption of meat during festivities especially during *Eid Fitr* and *Eid Adha* is a critical topic of discussion in the group (Barrie, 2018). Other than that, people usually share their knowledge and experiences. There are also vegan groups that do not directly refer to Muslim but the name of countries with a large population of Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2011; Sen Nag, 2019) such as *Moroccan Vegans* (n.d.), *Pakistan Initiative for Veganism* (n.d.), and *Saudi Vegan* (n.d.).

Despite that, the topic of veganism is a rare discussion among Muslim scholars although some have written articles and chapters in books related to veganism and vegan diet (Ali, 2015; Masri, 2007; Mcleod, 2018; Riaz & Chaudry, 2004).

Terminology

Indeed, the discussion of veganism within the Islamic tradition is not a topic that has never been discussed. Perhaps the usage of vegan term was not as popular as

Table 1

Members of Muslim vegans' Facebook groups

Facebook groups	Groups created (date)	Total number of group members (account) on 17/9/2019	Last updated discussion in the groups on 17/9/2019 (date)
Vegan Muslim Community (n.d.)	6/6/2013	5134	17/9/2019
Muslim Vegans (n.d.)	8/7/2014	1446	16/9/2019
Raw Vegan Muslims (n.d.)	3/6/2016	731	13/9/2019
Muslim Vegans for Healthy World (n.d.)	12/12/2015	318	8/8/2019
Muslim Vegans Vegetarians and their guests (n.d.)	10/10/2018	147	10/9/2019
Australian Vegan Muslims (n.d.)	2/7/2015	38	No access
SG Veg Muslims (n.d.)	3/7/2017	181	17/9/2019

Table 2

Followers of Muslim vegans' Facebook pages

Facebook Pages	Page created (date)	Total number of accounts followed the pages on 17/9/2019 (account)	Last updated post on the pages by admin of the pages on 17/9/2019 (date)
The Vegan Muslim Initiative (n.d.)	6/10/2016	4460	22/8/2019
Veganism and Islam (n.d.)	3/4/2017	4074	16/9/2019
Muslim Vegans of Singapore (n.d.)	2/4/2018	728	12/9/2019
Vegan Muslim (n.d.)	2/11/2015	214	2/9/2017
The Black Muslim Vegan (n.d.)	28/7/2017	115	15/9/2019

vegetarian which was more prominent in Islamic theme academic discussion. Most scholars highlighted the ‘vegetarian’ term rather than ‘vegan’. Basheer Ahmad Masri is one of the earliest Muslim scholars who has discussed vegetarianism in his book. He wrote a chapter named “*Vegetarianism v/s Meatarianism*” in *Animal Welfare in Islam* (2007), which was first published in 1988 (Haleem, 2007). He did mention about ‘vegan’ seven times in this chapter, but he focused more on the term ‘vegetarian’ as mentioned the word 47 times. Richard C. Foltz, in his article, *Is Vegetarianism is Un-Islamic?* (2001) mentioned ‘vegetarian’ 33 times. He did not mention any ‘vegan’ term in his article.

Furthermore, in a book entitled *Halal Food Production*, ‘vegetarian’ term was mentioned 37 times while ‘vegan’ term was only mentioned 11 times in the chapter of *Comparison of Kosher, Halal, and Vegetarian* (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). Kecia Ali mentioned 47 times the word ‘vegetarian’ in her article *Muslims and Meat-Eating: Vegetarianism, Gender, and Identity* (2015). However, she only mentioned ‘vegan’ once in the article. On the other hand, Duke Mcleod focused on the ‘vegan’ term. In his dissertation entitled *A Path of Justice and Compassion: About Vegan Muslims and Islamic Veganism* (2018), he mentioned 379 times the ‘vegan’ term, while only mentioned ‘vegetarian’ for 31 times in the discussion. Table 3 shows the frequency on usage of ‘vegetarian’ and ‘vegan’ term between *Vegetarianism v/s Meatarianism* which is a chapter discussing

on vegetarian in *Animal Welfare in Islam* (2007), *Is Vegetarianism is Un-Islamic?* (2001), *Comparison of Kosher, Halal, and Vegetarian* which is a chapter discussing on vegetarian in *Halal Food Production* (2004), *Muslims and Meat-Eating: Vegetarianism, Gender, and Identity* (2015) and *A Path of Justice and Compassion: About Vegan Muslims and Islamic Veganism* (2018).

Particularly, these writings are selected for comparison as these writings’ natures are directly related to Islamic theme and either vegan or vegetarian. In the literature, Foltz (2001) used the term ‘vegetarian’ as a general term for the exclusion of meat in dietary. Some other scholars (Ali, 2015; Masri, 2007; Riaz & Chaudry, 2004) used the word ‘vegetarian’ to refer to the reduction of meat consumption while ‘vegan’ as an extension of vegetarian, which is a total exclusion of meat consumption. Thus, they chose to focus on ‘vegetarian’ instead of ‘vegan’ in their discussions because the term ‘vegetarian’ is more general. Meanwhile, Mcleod (2018) used the term ‘vegan’ in his dissertation to discuss ethical veganism as well as Islamic Veganism concepts. However, the ‘vegetarian’ term was more frequently used than ‘vegan’ term in the discussion by Muslim scholars, thus, Mcleod mentioned the ‘vegetarian’ term to cite previous literature in his dissertation.

It should be noted that veganism is not vegetarianism. However, some literature works describe veganism as a part of vegetarianism despite there are differences that are not only in the diet practice (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017) and

Table 3
Frequency on usage of 'Vegetarian' and 'Vegan' term

Article/ book chapter/ dissertation	Frequency	
	Vegetarian	Vegan
Vegetarianism v/s meatarianism (2007)	47 87%	7 13%
Is vegetarianism un-Islamic? (2001)	33 100%	0 0%
Comparison of kosher, <i>halal</i> , and vegetarian (2004)	37 77%	11 33%
Muslims and meat-eating: Vegetarianism, gender, and identity (2015)	47 99%	1 1%
A path of justice and compassion: About vegan Muslims and Islamic veganism (2018)	31 8%	379 92%

it involves their lifestyle and belief as well. Vegetarianism has many types which some of the definitions are strict in avoiding animal consumption, and some others are lenient (Altas, 2017). Vegetarianism is a concept that promotes a type of diet that may involve the consumption of animal meat or animal-derived products in limited quantities or none at all (Tunçay, 2016). In similarity, vegetarians and vegans avoid consuming animal products, but the biggest difference is to what extent animal products cannot be consumed (Ruby, 2012). It is more accurate to define veganism and vegetarianism separately because vegans criticize vegetarians for consuming animal products in certain terms while vegans do not consume any animal products at all (Tunçay, 2016). Veganism that has been practiced by Muslims as discussed before

indicated that they do not consume any animal at all therefore, vegan term is the accurate term compared to vegetarian, because vegetarian can consume animal products such as eggs and milk. However, the usage of 'vegetarian' term in writings by scholars (Ali, 2015; Foltz, 2001; Masri, 2007; Riaz & Chaudry, 2004) is relatable to the discussion in veganism. According to their usage of vegetarian term in their writing, they assumed vegetarian and vegan terms have the same meaning. Thus, in this article, past discussions related to vegetarianism from perspective of Muslims are accepted as sources even though the main discussion is on veganism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a narrative review explaining the existing knowledge on a topic based on all

the published research available on the topic. This qualitative research was conducted to explore and identify the elements of veganism and then each element of veganism is discussed and analysed through the viewpoints of various perspectives of (practicing and non-practicing) Muslims, based on their sentiments and personal preferences. Data were gathered through library research utilizing secondary data obtained from journals, books, seminars, papers, and internet resources on veganism, vegetarianism and Muslims' writing that closely related to veganism and vegetarianism. The researchers reviewed existing articles from scholars that have

discussed issues related to veganism to explore the elements of veganism sentiments and preferences among Muslims. Primary data collected from the Quran and Hadeeth are used to support secondary data. However, the views of references used, did not indicate specific sources of information that truly are from the sources of authentic Hadeeths and have direct traceability of linkages from the Narrators of Hadeeth, that explain related Quranic verses. The following Figure 1 shows the flow of this research starting with finding the elements of veganism and followed by the discussion of the elements from the Muslims' perspective.

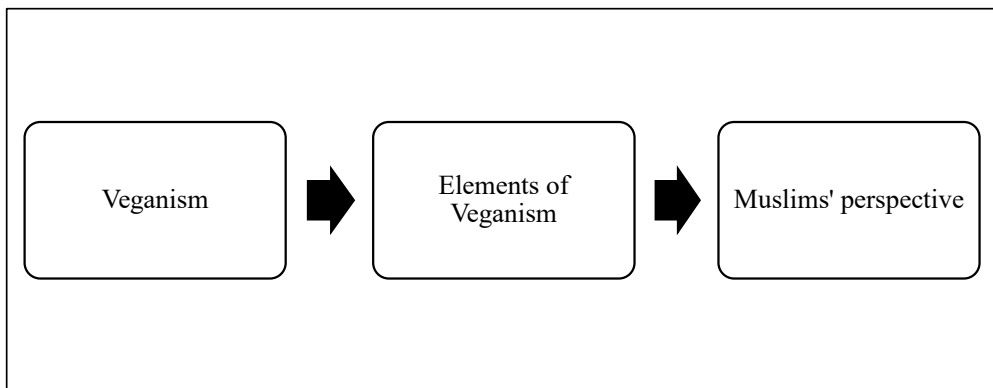


Figure 1. Flow of research

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Fundamental of Veganism

In order to understand the elements of veganism from Muslims' perspective, this article demands understanding on veganism purposes and practices. Any

practice would be fine as long as the purpose of veganism is achieved. However, it is significant to understand that the purposes of people practicing veganism are not necessarily the purpose of veganism itself. People who are following veganism and practicing a vegan diet may choose to do

so for multiple reasons, which in turn, may affect their food consumption and lifestyle choices (Dyett et al., 2013). “These reasons include health, animal rights (ethics), environmental concern, the influence of others, and sensory disgust, with health and ethical considerations emerging as the most often cited reasons” (Radnitz et al., 2015, p. 32).

According to The Vegan Society, veganism is a way of life that seeks to exclude, as far as it is possible and implementable, in any form of exploitation of, as well as cruelty to, animals for food consumption, clothing or any other purpose (Altas, 2017). From this definition, it can be understood that the most vital element of veganism is animal rights. This can be seen through the history of The Vegan Society. Before forming The Vegan Society, a few years before 1944, some members of the Vegetarian Society in London had been continuously proposing the idea of a non-dairy vegetarian diet (Mann, 2014). They argued that much harm came to animals as a consequence of dairy production and egg farming. Thus, The Vegan Society formed in 1944 initially opposed the use of eggs and animal dairy as food, and was later developed to prevent harm to living creatures. According to Mann (2014), veganism is no longer simply a diet but a lifestyle in which it eradicates the exploitation of animals to defend animal rights.

Besides, the exclusion of animals in food consumption is one of the important practices in the implementation of veganism. Despite

any eradication of animal exploitation and consumption would be considered as an act of veganism, vegan as a diet is still essential in veganism. As mentioned before, the initial concern of The Vegan Society was to remove dairy and egg consumption in the vegetarian diet and this concept of diet is known as vegan diet (Mann, 2014). People who practice vegetarian diet may not be contributing towards the purpose of veganism since vegetarian diet is not totally excluding animal consumption. However, people who practice a vegan diet may have different motivations (Radnitz et al., 2015) but the practice of vegan diet itself contributes to the purpose of veganism. Therefore, vegan diet is another significant element of veganism. Epistemologically, according to the definition of veganism by The Vegan Society (Altas, 2017), the foundation elements of veganism are animal rights and vegan diet.

Veganism Sentiments and Preferences among Muslims

Undoubtedly, two elements created veganism - animal rights and vegan diet. Without these, veganism cannot be fully defined. In order to look deeper into veganism from Muslims' perspective, it is more efficient to discuss these elements separately and find literature from Islamic theme, which is closely related to every fundamental element.

Animal Rights. According to Fakhar-i-Abbas (2009), the concept of animal rights in Islam is different from the concept of human

rights in Islam. He argued that even though animals can experience pain as humans can, rights are derived from the capacity to reason and therefore humans have rights and animals do not. His description on the matter implied that rights are equivalent to responsibilities. In his elaboration, humankind is held responsible for any injustice done to any of God's creatures that includes animals and plants. This is because animals, too, have functions in the community. The Quran has specified that all living creatures are connected in this world and each of them is the creation of God as human beings are.

And there is no **animal** that walks upon the earth nor a bird that flies with its two wings but (they are) genera like yourselves; We have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord shall they be gathered (Al-An'am (6): 38).

And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy, and We send down from the sky pure water. That We may bring to life thereby a dead land and give it as drink to those We created of numerous **livestock** and men (Al-Furqan (25): 48-49).

On the other hand, Basheer Ahmad Masri (2007) has an in-depth explanation of human dominion over the animal compared to Fakhar-i-Abbas. Islam declares mankind as the best of God's creation and designed as vicegerent on earth. Human beings are not superior over the animals in terms of physics but they have the ability to differentiate

between evil and virtue as well as to exercise freedom of choice. He added that even science has claimed that humans are the apex of creation based on the physiological superiority of them over the rest of the creations. Undoubtedly, the Quran makes it clear that human's viceregency is a liability that comes with responsibilities.

We have certainly created man in the best of stature; Then We return him to the lowest of the low, Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted (At-Tin (95): 4-6).

Nonetheless, Tlili (2018) critically disagrees with Masri's claim that humans are given dominion over other animals in Islam. The main reason for this disagreement is that, according to her, no verse in the Quran directly gives man dominion over other creatures. In her discussion, God has given mankind ownership in the land and has endowed them with power, but not necessarily the power or authority over other creatures. She describes a few other articles discussing the interpretation and translation of the Quranic verses on this issue.

In spite of that, Masri also states that each species of animals has its birth-right, which is a share in all-natural resources. Animals are capable of satiating their hunger and of procuring their necessities, if only they can do so without any interference from human beings. The Quran has mentioned that food and other resources of nature should be shared equitably with other creatures.

Then let mankind look at his food: How We poured down water in torrents, Then We broke open the earth, splitting [it with sprouts], and caused to grow within it grain; and grapes and herbage; and olive and palm trees; and gardens of dense shrubbery; and fruit and grass, [As] enjoyment for you and your grazing livestock (‘Abasa (80): 24-32).

Both Fakhar-i-Abbas (2009) and Masri (2007) agreed that the essence of the Islamic teachings on animal rights is depriving animals of their fair share in the nature’s resources. This is a serious sin in Islam. There is an incident from the past mentioned in the Quran many times in different contexts which is the story of the people of Thamud. According to Masri (2007):

The people of Thamud demanded that the Prophet Salih show them some sign to prove that he was a prophet of God. At that time the tribe was experiencing a dearth of food and water and was, therefore, neglecting its livestock. It was revealed to the Prophet Salih to single out a she-camel as a symbol and ask his people to give her a fair share of water and fodder. The people of Thamud promised to do that but, later, killed the camel. As retribution, the tribe was annihilated (p. 25).

According to Amanullah (2012), “Right in Islam is what is established in the Shariah in favour of Allah, human beings, collective entity, or animals on others as individuals, groups or community” (p. 66). Amanullah in his writing, has discussed on the definition

of rights in Islam, based on the discussion by Ahmad Fahmi Abu Sunnah, Basheer Ahmad Masri, Reza Gharebaghi, Fakhar-i-Abbas, Zakir Naik, Nilofar Ahmed and Huda. Some of these scholars have not include animal in the definition of right in Islam, while some of the others have include it in the definition. The rights of the animals are well established in Islam. Hence, the definition of right should include the rights of animals, and words of ‘animal’ are supposed to be added to this definition (Amanullah, 2012).

Unquestionably, animals in Islam are important creatures of Allah. Several numbers of chapters in the Quran are named with animals, such as *al-Baqarah* (the Cow), *al-Nahl* (the Bee), *al-Naml* (the Ants), *al-`Ankabut* (the Spider); *al-Fil* (the Elephant) (Amanullah, 2012). Despite animals being created to worship God, humans are also allowed to use animals for multiple reasons as long as in accordance with Islamic law (Al-Qaradawi, 2007; Nurdeng, 2009). Humans have always used animals for necessary labour, similar to how they depend on each other in services. Nevertheless, unlike humans, animals are not capable of protecting their rights as human labour could do. Masri (2007) describes that animal rights protection is left mainly to human conscience, social criticism and the government legislation. Although there are many laws in scriptures (from all religions), human needs and social conditions are continuously changing, thus, affecting their social and moral values according to the demand from the current social lifestyles.

In fact, Islam prohibits cruelty to animals (Al-Qaradawi, 2007). Amanullah (2012), has provided multiple ethics specifically for treating animals based on the verses in the Quran as well as the Hadeeths. One of the examples given by Abdul Rahman (2017), “a good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being” (Sahih al-Bukhari). Prophet Muhammad was clear in his disapproval of the cruelty to animals. Prophet Muhammad says: “... Whatever cut off from an animal while it is alive is considered to be dead, it should not be eaten” (Al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud) (Amanullah, 2012, p. 64). Despite Islam allows Muslims to slaughter animals for consumption, Islam insists that the manner of slaughter should be the least painful for the animals (Al-Qaradawi, 2007).

Additionally, Sarra Tlili (2018) in her article, aims to assess the current debate on animal ethics in Islamic tradition. She discusses the matter of animal rights in Islam in a more complex and realistic manner. Muslims insisted that their tradition is highly attentive to the wellbeing of animals and other creatures. Despite that, modern assessments have reflected that Islamic tradition is not as animal-friendly as it was previously assumed, whereas at the empirical level, Muslims’ treatment of animals has deteriorated. As an example, Kristen Stilt (2017, as cited in Tlili, 2018) states that Egypt, a Muslim-majority country, receiving an ‘F’ (very poorly) on an ‘A’ to ‘G’ grading scale in world surveys

of animal welfare from the organization, World Animal Protection, in 2014. However, Tlili poses her wonder in the article, “*what kind of criteria are adopted in assigning Egypt an ‘F’ grade for its treatment of animals?*” Multiple reasons could be the factors for this result of the evaluation on Muslims’ treatment on animals. It might be true that Muslims’ attitudes toward animals have deteriorated and it might be that the framework of the tradition evaluated is no longer the same (Tlili, 2018). This is because this was observed from the perspective of animal rights advocacy, in which cultural, ideological, and political sensitivities play a major part in shaping this debate (Tlili, 2018).

Vegan Diet. As mentioned by Izzi Dien (2000, as cited in Foltz, 2001), there is no argument in Islamic law that animals should not be killed for food. The Islamic legal opinion on this issue is based on clear verses of the Quran. He adds, Muslims are not only prohibited from eating certain food, but also may not choose to prohibit themselves from consuming food that is allowed by Islam. In relation to vegetarianism, Izzi Dien states that it is not allowed under the pretext of prioritizing the interest of animals because such decisions belong to God unless it is for medical necessity or the only option given for consumption. There are few verses in the Quran allowing Muslims to eat animals. Allah says:

O you who have believed, fulfill the obligations. The Cattle quadrupeds are allowed to you except that which

is recited to you [in this Quran], not violating the prohibition against game when you are entering upon the performance of the pilgrimage: Surely Allah orders what he desires (Al-Ma'idah (5): 1).

Say, "I do not find within that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an eater to eat of except that it be what has died of itself or blood poured forth, or flesh of swine - for that surely is unclean—or that which is a transgression, other than (the name of) Allah having been invoked on it; but whoever is driven to necessary, not desiring nor exceeding the limit, then surely your your Lord is Forgiving and Merciful" (Al-An'am (6): 145).

It is Allah who made for you the grazing animals upon which you ride, and some of them you eat (Ghafir (40): 79).

Besides, Mcleod, one of the Muslims who are practicing veganism, in his dissertation (2018), points out few statements in regard to some Muslims who refused to consume meat. The act of refusing to eat animals could be understood as ingratitude for God's gifts bestowed on humanity in which cannot be described as Islamic. Zakir Naik, on the other hand, states that vegetarianism is permissible on a personal level but unreasonable, due to the Quran allowing meat consumption, and plants are alive and feel pain too (Mcleod, 2018). However, Foltz, as cited by Mcleod (2018) states that the idea of 'refusing to eat meat equals disobedience to God since God had allowed

humans to eat meat' is not necessarily correct. He not only argues vegetarianism is permissible but also argued that meat-eating culture in Muslim communities is against two core themes of the Quran, which are compassion and social justice, citing issues such as animal abuse, environmental destruction and human malnutrition in his elaboration. Foltz continued his discussion on vegetarianism in his 2006 book, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Mcleod, 2018). Meat-eating should be seen as a practicability approach found in the Quran and not as a compulsory practice. This is because, according to Foltz, meat-eating is only allowed in the Quran since the nomadic Arabs could not face starvation in extreme conditions if they solely rely on a vegetarian diet. Thus, from this perspective (Foltz, 2006), it can be deduced that meat-eating practice was tolerated rather than endorsed towards Muslims (Mcleod, 2018).

Undeniably, Islam is neutral and has given individuals the choice either to be a vegetarian or a meat eater because there is no suggestion in the Quran nor in any other Islamic sources that eating meat is good for physical or spiritual health (Masri, 2007). Eating meat is not an obligation for Muslims even though it is permissible (Mcleod, 2018). It simply means that meat could be eaten. According to Masri (2007), there are many other things that have not been forbidden by Islam, particularly in food, but Muslims have stopped eating them because there are better alternatives to be consumed. In this case, information about balanced nutrition found in vegetables was not available then,

but can be identified in the modern era. However, Masri acknowledges that it is difficult to change over to vegetarian since his body got so used to meat consumption. It would be an ideal situation from the humanitarian perspective if all of the people in the world are vegetarian and all the animals are allowed to live their natural lives (Masri, 2007).

Unlike the other scholars, Hamza Yusuf is not interested to discuss the permissibility of vegetarian diet or meat consumption in Islam, but he is more concerned on the overconsumption of meat among the communities (Yusuf, 2011). In his speech, he states that Prophet Muhammad was a 'semi-vegetarian' and did not consumed many portions of meat (Ali, 2015; Yusuf, 2011). According to the definition, semi-vegetarians or demi-vegetarians, or some known as flexitarians, is a group of people who practice a plant-based diet but occasionally eat meat (slaughtered flesh), poultry and fish (Le & Sabaté, 2014; Phillips, 2005). Yusuf added that 'Umar Al-Khattab said, "*beware of meat, because it has an addiction like the addiction of wine*". Meat is allowed in Islam but it is not a necessary for consumption, but in fact, Muslims have consumed meat excessively. Subsequently, there is a concern by Muslim scholars on this issue. However, the concern on meat consumption is not necessarily the only reason Muslims reduce meat consumption. Kecia Ali (2015) in her article, states that thinkers and activists often discuss reducing meat consumption, either because of the increased price of ethical or organic meat,

or because of meat production's impact on ecology, health, or animal welfare.

Apart from that, there were already many Muslims, practicing vegetarianism in their lifestyle since early times. According to Foltz (2001), throughout the history of Muslims, many of them practiced vegetarianism including South Asian Sufis, the Suhrawardi saint Hamid al-din Nagori, and others. It is also reported that, there are some areas in Muslim-majorities countries such as Turkey, Iran and Tehran that have vegetarian organizations. Foltz describes in his writing that there were Sufis who aimed to purify their body with abstention from meat consumption, apart from health purposes. Whilst some others have incorporated abstention from meat consumption as nourishing the 'animal soul'. It is clear that some Muslim Sufis believed that vegetarian diet is good for both physical and spiritual benefits.

In Malaysia, the Mufti of Federal Territory has already provided a fatwa on the practice of vegetarian diet in 2017. The fatwa on the practice of vegetarian diet is based on the understanding of the meaning of vegetarian, which is "a person who does not eat meat, fish and others, but only consume vegetables for personal, religious or other reasons" (Al-Bakri, 2017). Muslim are allowed to practice vegetarian diet because of personal reasons such as for nutritional benefits and protecting ecosystem or to control meat-eating consumption because food dietary is a personal choice. Sahih al-Bukhari (5216) from Ibn Umar R. Anhuma, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH

said: “I do not eat mastigure, but I do not prohibit its eating” (Al-Bakri, 2017, p. 1). However, if a Muslim chooses to become a vegetarian because of religious beliefs such as the belief in other religions that prohibit the eating of cow meat, or totally prohibit on the consumption of meat, or the denial in *Eid Adha* of the sanctioning of *Qurban* (sacrifice) and the sunnah of eating the meat of sacrificial animals, then Islam prohibits it (Al-Bakri, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this article describes several debates on the elements of veganism from the Islamic perspective in response to a number of Muslims practicing veganism as a lifestyle, particularly in their diet. From the Islamic worldview, Muslims are allowed to consume some animals, while according to veganism, humans should not consume any part of animals. Some Muslim scholars argued that humans are the best creation and have rights over other creations, while veganism votes for equal rights for animals to be protected without being used by humans. The concept of veganism is not existed in Islamic tradition but Islam has its own concept and practices on animal rights. It is hard to provide an absolute middle ground understanding in term of permissibility of animal consumption between Islamic worldview and veganism but it is not impossible for a Muslim to practice vegan diet given that Muslims have been practicing vegetarian diet since a long time ago for multiple reasons,

physically and spiritually. Consuming animals is permissible in Islam, but it is not compulsory for Muslims to consume it. Some Muslims as discussed, are practicing vegan diet due to the influence communities’ culture and habits as example some Muslim Sufis were practicing vegan diet. While some of the others are practicing it because of personal choice due to health concerns or environmental causes.

The discussion of veganism and vegan diet should not be limited to only within the permissibility of animal consumption. Other than that, this topic could be explored on its relevance to be practiced by Muslims. As an example, research on the factors of vegan diet practice among Muslims in certain areas in Malaysia is vital, to identify the reason for their choice and also the resources of information accepted by them to make their decision to be a part of veganism community. This information will help to determine their perspective and assumption towards Islamic tradition itself, particularly in relation to animal consumption.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article. The authors would like to thank the reviewers and proof-readers for their valuable time and comments to improve this article. This research received no external funding.

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